

Prison Palace; Reading County Goal
Open Letter. Lambeth. 1847.

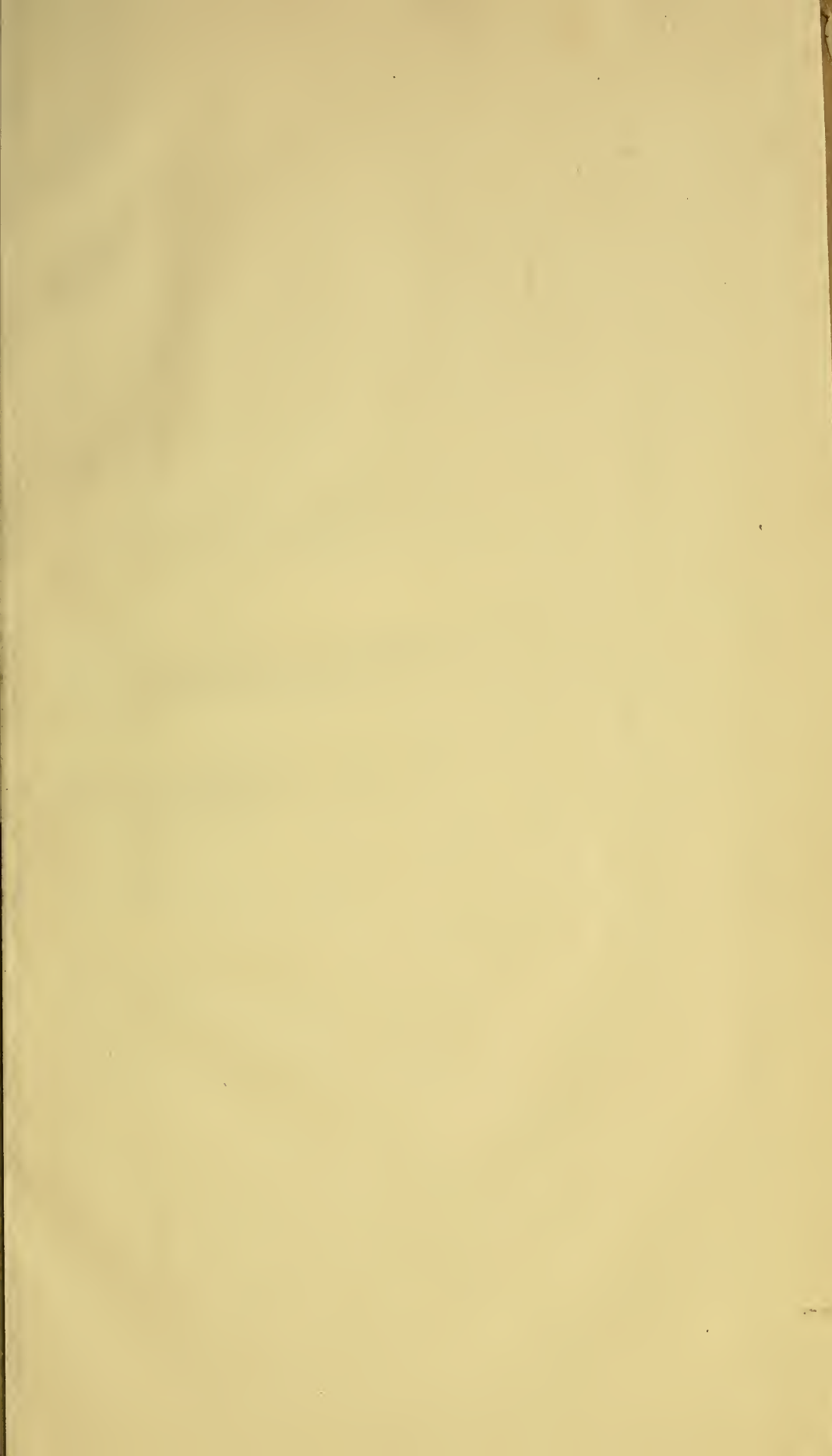
THE JOHN R. OLIVER

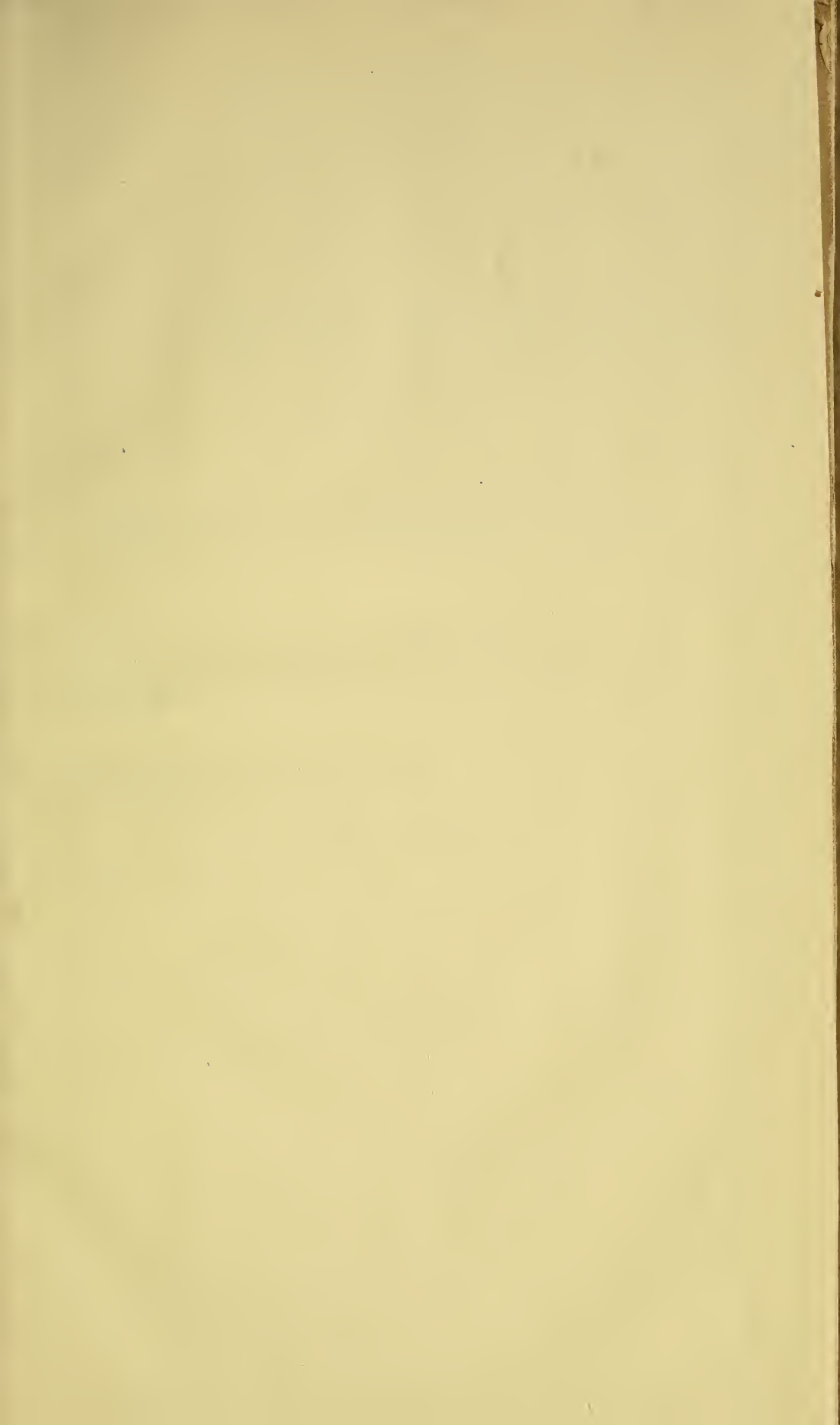
CRIMINOLOGICAL COLLECTION


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V I E W

OF THE

PRISON PALACE,

CALLED

READING COUNTY GAOL,

FOR THE

BOARD, EDUCATION, AND MAINTENANCE

OF

CONVICTED CRIMINALS,

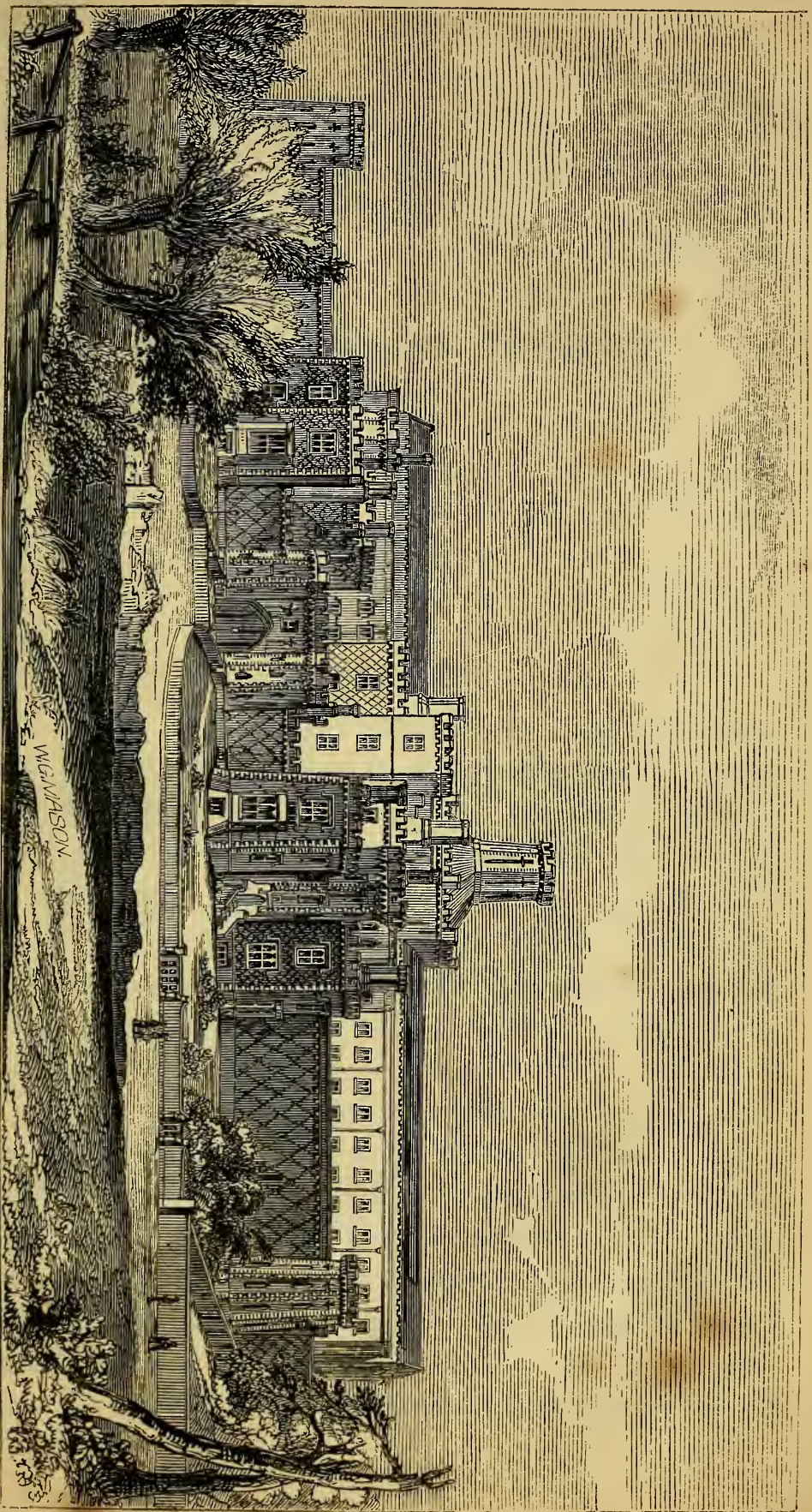
AT THE

P U B L I C E X P E N S E .

EXTRACTED FROM MR. CHARLES PEARSON'S FIRST
LETTER TO THE ELECTORS OF LAMBETH.

JULY, 1847.

READING COUNTY GAOL.





TO MR. CHARLES PEARSON.

SIR,

I have received your address, and much approve of that part which relates to Pentonville Model Prison and Reading Gaol. Why do you not circulate a copy of that portion of the letter, with a drawing of the Gaol, as you showed it at your Lecture? It is impossible for people to conceive of the absurd extravagance of the system by merely reading your account, although it is expressed in such plain and forcible terms.

I see, in a book upon education, lately published by the Government, they say that the expense of preventing and punishing crime in this country amounts to more than *two millions of pounds* a year; and yet the number of criminals rapidly increases.

This is not surprising, if such *Prison Palaces* are built in the country, while the poor and destitute are shut up in Union Houses, or compelled to

live in pestilential hovels not fit to shelter a dog. People may say what they please, but it is *hungry bellies* and *ragged backs* that make roguish heads and *thieving* hands.

Give the poor man a fair day's wages for a fair day's work, and he will take care of his offspring, and in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand neither he nor they will give you any trouble, or put the public to any expense, either as "juvenile" or adult offenders.

Let *real* criminals be *really* punished, and not petted and pampered—as the Model Prison and Reading Gaol prisoners are treated.

I don't agree with you in *Politics* any more than I agree with the other Candidates; you are in that respect all *tarred with the same brush*, as the saying is. I shall, however, give you my plumper, *notwithstanding* your politics, because I believe the measures you have proposed will diminish taxation, and increase the welfare of the people.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN BULL.

Lambeth, 12th July, 1847.

EXTRACTED FROM

MR. CHARLES PEARSON'S FIRST LETTER

TO THE

ELECTORS OF LAMBETH.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.

Nearly thirty years since, when a mere boy, I was privileged by the venerable Samuel Favell to second in the Common Council his motion for a petition to Parliament to ameliorate and reform our Criminal Code.

I was thence led to bring my professional education to bear upon a subject which has never afterwards been absent from my mind. Since that period I twice served the office of undersheriff of London and Middlesex; I filled the chair of a Corporation Committee appointed to inquire into the effect of our criminal laws upon the criminal classes of society, and I have been honoured with the confidence and concurrence of many of the wisest and best of both sexes, who have made the relations of crime and punishment, prison discipline, and prison reform, the objects of their anxious solicitude and care.

With the exception of one system, to which attention has been only recently directed, every variety of treatment has during this period been fully tried. Under the auspices of the philanthropic, the goals of this country, in point of beauty, order, cleanliness, convenience, and health, have, during the last half century, been raised from pest-houses to palaces, and, as far as mental occupation and moral instruction are concerned, the treatment of the prisoners has been proportionably improved.

The several systems under which these changes have been effected bear the most diverse, and even opposite characters. The Congregated System, the Classified System, the Silent System, and the Separate System, have all had their advocates, and have successively been in the ascendant, but they have failed, and will all fail, in my opinion, to accomplish the great objects of their benevolent advocates, because they are all based upon what appears to me to be a fatal error. They assume that *privation of liberty* and *corporal coercion*, combined with mental and moral instruction, will operate as agents sufficiently deterring and reformatory, to effect the repression of crime, unaccompanied by continuous labour in some productive occupation, analogous to the pursuits by which the prisoner on his restoration to society must be enabled to gain an honest livelihood, or else return to a life of crime.

The Separate System (or the Solitary System, as it is frequently but improperly called), is that which some time since prevailed in the United States. It has been partially tried here, and is now gaining ground in this and other countries. It is in operation at Reading, Perth, Bath, Wakefield, Preston, and some other places. It has been too recently introduced into this country to enable us to state what may be the precise amount of its effect upon recommitments, as compared with other systems; but I have heard from credible authority, by the evidence of a witness examined before a Committee of the House of Lords, and from other means of information, that the system in this important element of success has wholly failed to counterbalance the enormous expense with which it is unavoidably attended, if carried out in that spirit of humanity with which in England at least, it must be administered.

Under this system criminals are better and more expensively lodged, taught, clothed, and fed, than nineteen-twentieths of the honest and industrious poor; nay more, because a healthful circulation of the blood cannot be maintained in prison without labour, which is exploded from the system, the warming and ventilation of the apartments is made more perfect and more costly than the airing and warming of the mansions of the nobles of our land.

The motives of those by whom this plan of entire separation and remission of labour was devised I have not the slightest intention to impugn; but its justice, its policy, and expediency I without reservation arraign.

To enable you to judge of the soundness of my views, I will state a series of facts connected with Reading County Gaol, which is conducted upon this system. I select this prison for the illustration of my views, because it was built for the pur-

pose of separation, and it exhibits the system in its very best form.

The building occupies a most conspicuous situation near to the Great Western Railway, and is one of the most beautiful erections in the country. Instead of wearing the gloomy and repelling aspect by which our old-fashioned gaols were distinguished, it shows an attractive cheerful countenance; and, if the advantages—mental, moral, and corporeal—which its interior affords could be obtained without the preliminary commission of crime, I verily believe that the establishment might be constantly filled by voluntary inmates from amongst the meritorious poor of the surrounding district.

Respectable persons are admitted to view the establishment without a magistrate's order between the hours of 10 and 12, and 2 and 4. Its excellent officers take pleasure in showing it to strangers; they exhibit specimens of the diet, clothing, and bedding, and explain fully the working of the system. I have visited the prison twice during the last two years; on the first visit the number of inmates was 50; the daily average I am informed in that year did not exceed 16; on the last occasion the daily average number was 120. The following are the notes I made after the second visit:—

The official staff consists of a governor, chaplain, surgeon, deputy-governor, matron, storekeeper, eight warders, schoolmaster, porter, cook, female warder, engineer, clerk, prison servant, and trades instructor.

The superior officers are evidently men well fitted for their duties, the chaplain is a devoted advocate of the Separate System, and "his heart is in his work." The warders are dressed in uniform, they are fine officer-like looking men, and appear to be intelligent and humane. The apartments of the prisoners are clean, light, airy, and spacious, with water laid on, and every accommodation for washing, &c, in their own apartments; the food frugal but abundant, and of excellent quality, the instruction the prisoners receive is sound, combining with religious teaching, various descriptions of useful and agreeable knowledge.

The government of the gaol is under the supervision of an intelligent body of the county magistracy, who take great pains to see that the system is properly carried out; the prison exhibits the greatest cleanliness, comfort, order, quietude, and regularity. The building cost upwards of £50,000, the money was borrowed on the county rates at 4 per cent. The building fund, therefore, has imposed upon the rate-payer a permanent charge of £2,000 per annum, or the earlier liquidation of the capital by extra rates. Dividing the interest by 120, the average

number of the inmates, gives £16 10s. as the annual cost of each man's lodging; the average cost of his diet and clothing is £11 5s., and his proportion of the cost of the general prison expenses, including the staff of officers employed for his restraint, and his medical, educational, and religious treatment averages £29, so that the gross annual cost to the county rates of each man, woman, and child in Reading Gaol is upwards of £56; while the average wages of our agricultural labourer ranges from 7s. to 10s. a-week, say the latter sum, or £26 a-year, out of which he has to provide lodging, food, fuel, clothing for himself and family, and perhaps education for three or four children; or being destitute of the means of educating his children, they must grow up in the state of heathen ignorance upon which the speakers upon the subject of education have so forcibly dwelt.

In the ancient monastic institutions of this and other countries, repentant sinners were permitted to dream away the remainder of their existence, beyond the reach of this world's temptations. If there were any philanthropic fund, out of which the inmates of Reading Gaol could be maintained for the remainder of their lives without labouring at some productive occupation, the public might possibly have no right to complain of the application of private funds, in attempting to carry on the work of moral reform by such means and at such a cost, but to take from the pockets of the public such enormous sums, with a view to the repression of crime, is, in my humble judgment, as unwise as it is unjust. If the funds of the rate-paying farmer are diminished by unnecessary contributions to county rates, he has so much less means to work his land, and he must either diminish the number of his labourers or the amount of their pay; in either case their state of destitution is increased, which, far more than the ignorance of the people, is the fruitful source of crime.

It will be perceived by the list of the staff-officers of the gaol a "Trades Instructor" is enumerated. I saw the youth who filled this situation; he told me that, in point of fact, no "trade" was taught in the gaol, but that he taught some of the prisoners "knitting," which with oakum-picking, and pumping the water for the washing, &c., of the prison, was the only labour performed by the inmates.

On the credit side of the printed account, I found an item of receipts for "productive labour," amounting during the quarter to £1 8s. 6d.; less than 3d. per prisoner per quarter, a sum too small to find the representative of a week's labour in any denomination of the coin of the realm.

Mr. Field, the zealous chaplain of Reading Gaol, in his

printed report laid before the Houses of Parliament, frankly says that "short imprisonments are inimical to any material moral amendment, and quite inadequate to deter from crime, either under the Separate or any other system of prison discipline."

The Parliamentary returns show that the number of convictions and imprisonments for crime in England and Wales amounts to about 100,000 in the year, out of which more than three-fourths are for short terms, ranging from ten days to three months; so that, in the vast majority of cases under the present system of criminal jurisprudence, it is admitted by its most intelligent and able advocate, the Separate System, as a reformatory or deterring agent, entirely fails of success.

As an instrument of lengthened punishment for grave offences, the Separate System is pregnant, I think, with still greater evils;—its severity or laxity, in such cases, is dependant upon the agencies by which it is intended to be carried out. If, as at Reading, the administration is humane and liberal, and the staff of officers intelligent and numerous; or if, as at Bath, the chaplain of the prison (who is described in the Inspector's Report as a zealous advocate for the Separate System) will kindly relieve the *ennui* of the inmates, by giving them the use of "a library of useful and entertaining knowledge," and by delivering lectures to the prisoners upon "Natural History, Astronomy, Optics, &c.," the system will operate as a premium on crime; if, on the other hand, its essential principles of separation and seclusion are applied with severity and parsimony, the system can only be enforced with an amount of solitude and suffering not to be contemplated without the most painful emotions. In whatever form the system is administered, whether with severity or humanity, it is, in cases of long confinement, productive of effects upon the mental and physical condition of the sufferers for which no other advantages it may possess can possibly compensate.

Mr. Hampton, the Surgeon-Superintendent having the charge of 345 "exiles," who had been confined from 12 to 18 months upon the Separate System in the Model Prison, thus writes to the Governor:—

"I experienced some difficulty at first in berthing and arranging these men, who, apparently, from not having been associated together for some time, were slow in comprehending orders, and equally slow in obeying them, although evidently tractable and willing; in fact, they had lost their gregarious habits, and did not again acquire them until after some weeks."

"The sudden change from great seclusion to the bustle and noise of a crowded ship, produced a number of cases of con-

vulsions, attended in some instances with nausea and vomiting, in others simulating hysteria, and in all being of a most anomalous character. The recumbent position, fresh air, mild stimulants, &c., were found beneficial in all these cases, and after three days the convulsions disappeared."

After a time the benefits of a sea voyage, and the influence of a mild and more constant climate, showed themselves in the improved condition of the convicts, and the results of their education in the Model Prison were permitted to develope themselves, for Mr. Hampton says that during the voyage—

"Divine service was performed morning and evening every Sunday after the embarkation of the convicts; the Church of England service and a sermon being read each time. The morning services were conducted by myself, the evening by the Religious Instructor. To improve the prisoners' minds, as well as to increase their self-respect and estimation of each other, a certain number of the most intelligent were selected, and encouraged to deliver lectures to their fellow-prisoners in the evenings, on instructive and interesting subjects; and many of these lectures, as well as the attentive manner in which they were listened to, would have done credit to similar meetings of free men having much greater pretensions.

"Among the subjects selected by the lecturers, I may mention the Advantages of Education; the Use and Abuse of Music; Comparative Anatomy; English History; the Origin of Names; Universal History; Astronomy; Poetry; Ornithology; Characteristics of the Human Race; Circulation of the Blood; the Duties of Domestic Servants; Architecture, &c.

"A Weekly Newspaper was also proposed, edited, and carried on by the prisoners in a very highly creditable manner. In fact, every possible means were used to excite and keep up a healthy, vigorous, manly tone of mind amongst the convicts, and with the most pleasing results."

It will be recollected that the persons here spoken of were convicted criminals, who had been thus educated at the public expense, and were then on their voyage as "exiles" to a foreign country, where the climate being mild and constant, and labour in great demand, they might reasonably hope to spend the remainder of their days with a degree of peace and plenty which the great majority of the honest labourers of their father land were left in vain to sigh for.

But change the picture, that the mind may contemplate what would be the effect of these "pleasing results" of this system upon an English labourer destined on his exclusion from the goal to get his living by hard work under all the changes of our variable climate.

The Inspector's report of Reading gaol furnishes a daily register of the changes of the atmosphere within and without the walls of the establishment, from which it appears that while in 12 days the atmosphere without ranged 31 degrees, the variations of the temperature in the apartments in which the inmates of the prison sleep and study did not exceed two degrees. This equability of temperature was effected by means of a scientific system of warming and ventilation superior to any nobleman's drawing-room.

Let your imaginations depict the fate of an agricultural labourer, a navigator, a bricklayer, or other out-door labourer, discharged from such an establishment at the end of 12 or 18 months, and driven out into the wide world, by his daily labour, to earn his daily bread.

With his appetite educated to expect, with the regularity of clock-work, to be daily supplied with solid, wholesome, and palatable food—with his mind taught to appreciate the charms of quietude and study—with his whole frame enervated by ease, and indolence, and warmth, and sedentary occupation,—what must be the fate of such a man when turned loose into the world without house or home, without money or friends, to engage in competition in the labour market with men whose robust frames are prepared to encounter privations, fatigues, and all the variations of climate to which a labourer in this country is necessarily exposed ?

I hope I do not undervalue the benefits that may be derived from the mental and moral teaching which is the prevailing discipline of the new system—I hope I do not underrate the value of the accomplishments with which these exiles were gifted ; but I shall, I am sure, be joined by every reflecting person in denouncing, as equally impolitic, unjust, and illusory, a system which holds out the prospect of reforming the criminals of this country, by discountenancing severe and continuous useful occupation, and looking to moral and intellectual teaching only, as adequate instruments for repressing the growth of crime.

Sir Eardley Wilmot, writing of the exiles mentioned by Mr. Hampton, while praising their docility and general conduct, says of them, nearly a year after their liberation from the Model Prison,—“ *I should say from my own observation, as well as the reports of others, that they are depressed in spirits, and appear as if their minds and energies still felt the weight which their peculiar treatment at home appears to have produced.*” If this was the condition of men under the favourable circumstances they were placed in, what would have been their fate if they had been exposed to the hardships they would have had to encounter in their own country ?

JUVENILE OFFENDERS.

The House of Commons has been recently deluged with statistical and other statements, to show the enormous increase of crime in this country. Although the increase in the number of commitments and convictions (600 per cent.) during the last 40 years does not afford a true standard of the actual increase of crime; yet, after making all proper deductions on account of circumstances affecting rather the apparent than the real increase, the residue shows a most alarming augmentation, and particularly amongst that class which has acquired an unhappy notoriety under the title of "Juvenile offenders," a class which almost all persons concur in considering rather as objects of compassion than punishment, if any other than penal measures could be devised to check their increasing numbers.

The walls of the Commons House have rung with the assertion that ignorance is the cause of this increase of crime, and that instruction must work the cure; if this proposition were true, we should have found that ignorance had increased in something like the ratio that crime had been augmented; whereas, the facts directly contradict the supposition. During the last 40 years, when population has increased 60, and convictions 600 per cent., popular education has improved in quality, and, as appears from the reports of the National Society and other sources of information, the means of education provided for the masses of our youth by public contributions has increased more than 800 per cent. I confidently affirm, that it is not wholly, or even principally, to the ignorance of the people, but to the errors of legislation, that the increase of crime must be ascribed. The working of the New Poor Law, which has rendered the workhouse more hateful than the gaol, the Police Acts, the vagrant laws, which annually send thousands and tens of thousands of destitutes, by means of summary convictions, to our prisons or houses of correction, as they are delicately called; the multiplication of statutes which consign both children and adults to a criminal gaol for petty *mala prohibita*, or the most trifling offences, are, with other concurrent legislative errors, the fruitful sources of

crime's increase. To familiarise a petty transgressor, whether a juvenile or an adult, with the atmosphere of a gaol, whence labour is banished, and where every comfort may be obtained without work, is to confound the distinctions between virtue and crime, which it should be the province of the law to define and maintain.

I have, for the last twelve or fourteen years, been endeavouring to attract attention to this subject. The alarming increase of juvenile delinquency has at length forced itself upon public notice, and the Prison Inspectors have recommended measures which are, I understand, likely to be adopted. In my judgment, the means recommended are fundamentally erroneous, and, although they may be better than the present vicious system, they are alike impolitic and unjust, both to the nation which must pay, and the children who must suffer the discipline they recommend.

We are in the habit of hearing what is called the French system praised for acquitting as a criminal, and delivering over to a reformatory asylum, a child charged with offences, who, being under the age of 16, is held to have "*agi sans discernment.*" I know not whence the Code Napoleon took this law; but I do know that it is absurd to call it the *French* system—it is the *English* system, or the Saxon system, if you please; for, by the common law of England, a child under the age of discretion is held to be *incapax doli*, and is not amenable to the law, unless he is shown to be endowed with what has been termed a precocious mischievous discretion, or to have *agi avec discernment*, in the same manner as required by the French law.

I hope we shall see the principles of the English law in this particular brought into practical operation in this country, modified and adapted to the circumstances and state of society under which we live. Children under the age of discretion are not fit objects for penal infliction—they are not fit inmates of a criminal gaol. The returns from Parkhurst Prison—the evidence of Chaplains of Gaols, Prison Inspectors, and all other persons well informed upon the subject, concur in stating that children of convicts and other prisoners, deserted children, orphans, illegitimates, and others left in a state of destitution, are the mass from which our criminal classes are recruited—the raw material, as it were, of which our hardened criminals are afterwards composed.

When one of these children gets carried to prison for his first offence, you may very safely predicate that, in plunder or in prison expenses, he will cost the nation from 100*l.* to 200*l.* before he is finally disposed of; whereas, if the legislature

would combine courage with prudence, and would provide, instead of prisons, asylums, in which these unfortunates could be drilled and disciplined in hard work, suitable to their age and strength, and where they could, at the same time, receive appropriate instruction, combined with moral and religious training, they would become in after life good labourers and servants, good soldiers and good sailors, or good colonists, of a value to the nation equal in amount to the sum they now cost the country under the present system.

The two important subjects last referred to in this address, will in the ensuing Parliament be made the theme of the most anxious deliberations. Lord John Russell, in his address to the Electors of London, described it as "a problem yet to be solved," and the principal men of all parties in both houses of the legislature have expressed their earnest desire to devise some measures to stem the increase of crime which has taken place during the last forty years; but they all frankly avow that the systems of punishment, whether imprisonment or transportation, which have hitherto been tried, have signally failed, and they regard the changes that are now being made as experiments only, the result of which it is difficult to foresee.

To be placed in a situation in which I can bring my extensive experience and my anxious reflections upon these matters to bear upon the discussion of the subject, is the only motive which stimulates me to obtain a seat in Parliament. That I am not actuated by a craving for notoriety as a political agitator, may, I think, be fairly inferred from the fact, that during the last twelve years, notwithstanding the times have been pregnant with tempting opportunities for a man of my opinions to gratify such an appetite, I have not been present at any public discussion, or taken part in any of the popular movements of the day.

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